



Spirited Revivals:

Architects Bring New Life
to Historic Structures

by Denise Liebowitz

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Davis Photography

Porch of the renovated
Old Naval Hospital, now the Hill Center.



Classroom in the Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital.

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Award for Excellence in Historic Resources/ Presidential Citation for Sustainable Design

Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital

Washington, DC

BELL Architects, PC

Landscape Architects: Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

Structural Engineers: Robert Silman Associates

MEP Engineers: Grotheer & Co.

Civil/Geotechnical Engineers: AB Consultants, Inc.

Archaeologists: EAC Archaeology

Program Management: Regan Associates, LLC

Contractor/Construction Managers: Whiting-Turner Contracting Co.

In 1864 Abraham Lincoln commissioned \$25,000 for the construction of Washington's first naval hospital, just blocks from the US Capitol. By 1903 it was deemed too antiquated to serve as a modern medical facility and was used as a Hospital Corps training center. The transformations continued, with the building serving as a youth center before finally closing in the 1990s. For the building's Capitol Hill neighbors, the slow decay of this once-elegant Italianate-style landmark was a painful sight.

But thanks to the commitment of a diverse coalition of local residents, the Old Naval Hospital is back, this time as a carefully rehabilitated, environmentally conscious community center of life-long learning and cultural enrichment. The phased renewal of the entire site included the historic main building and its carriage house as well as the ornamental iron perimeter fence. Employing a new technology for the first time in a DC historic property, the design team installed a geoelectric HVAC system, which uses the earth as both a heat source and a heat sink, to avoid the intrusion of a cooling tower on the property. The former carriage house is now being transformed into a conservatory café and lush rain garden landscaping helps manage storm water runoff. On the exterior of the main building, the wood portico was restored as were the cast iron stairs, and a new side entry was established to permit easy access for visitors with wheelchairs and strollers. A widow's walk atop the third floor hides elevator equipment.

On the inside, a new energy-efficient elevator and inserted fire stairs serve all four floors. The building's majestic central stairway

and its grand proportions with 11-foot doors and 14-foot ceilings have been retained throughout. Craftsmen restored the two-foot-tall transoms over each interior door, adding an extra pane of fire glass in each, and installed custom sash locks made to match the originals on all the windows. They preserved the old wood-lath plaster where possible and painstakingly replaced it where not.

Commenting on one of the most notable changes to the building, David Bell, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, said, "Finding new uses for historical buildings often requires us to confront change. For the Hill Center, that change means color." Originally, the red brick hospital was painted to mimic sandstone, a common, economical way at the time to give a building a grander appearance. The paint weathered away decades ago, and the familiar exposed brick building settled comfortably into the cityscape. Following careful paint analysis, the design team reestablished the 19th-century palette of dark and light paint colors, thus returning the building to its historically authentic appearance.



Reception Hall of the maisonette at 998 Fifth Avenue, featuring restored walnut paneling.

Photo © David Paler/
David Paler Photography

Merit Award in Historic Resources

998 Fifth Avenue Maisonette

New York, New York

Wiedemann Architects, LLC

Interior Designers: Shaun Jackson Inc.

Kitchen Designer: Lorraine Frye

Lighting Designers: George Sexton Associates

MEP Engineers: Hanington Engineering Consultants

IT Consultants: Inventa Group, Inc.

AV Consultants: Sterio Exchange

Code Consultants: CODE NYC

Contractor: Uberto Limited

998 Fifth Avenue was perhaps the first building in New York City to make apartment living stylish. With Tennessee marble floors, refrigerated wine cellars, and walnut-paneled elevators, the building's opulence helped convince rich New Yorkers that apartments were acceptable habitats for high society. Designed in 1910 by the renowned architecture firm McKim, Mead & White for James T. Lee (grandfather of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis), 998 Fifth stands majestically across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In granting the building landmark status in 1974, the Landmark



Kitchen of the maisonette at 998 Fifth Avenue.

Photo © David Paler/David Paler Photography

Preservation Commission called it “the finest Italian Renaissance-style apartment house in New York City.”

While over the years the address retained all of its early glamour, a portion of the ground floor was transformed into a maze of doctors’ offices, complete with its separate street entrance. It is from this warren of little rooms and corridors that **Wiedemann Architects, LLC** has restored the grand spaces of the original residence, which comes with the distinction of its own private address at 999 Fifth Avenue. In the reception hall, French walnut paneling, which had been stained a dark brown, was stripped and refinished to its original light warm tones. The new salon incorporates several old offices and hallways and recreates the area of the original living and dining rooms but with a more open plan. The sweeping public space, with its restored original marble mantel, is lit by three large windows with views to the museum. Original plans and details of the trim and coffered ceilings unearthed at the New-York Historical Society guided the restoration of those elements. The design of the new wood floors was inspired by other McKim, Mead, & White patterns.

The master suite and bath occupy the space of the original primary bedroom and now incorporate the private entry of the doctors’ era. The dropped ceiling was removed to reveal the original 12-foot-plus ceilings and the window facing Fifth Avenue was replaced to match the historic windows. Two additional bedrooms flank a central bathroom, similar to the original plan. The new kitchen was installed where the original kitchen and pantry once stood. The study, originally two servants’ rooms before being converted into another medical office, looks out to a courtyard garden through windows with diamond-pattern glazing similar to the originals found in other apartments in the building. The result is a gracious apartment where modern-day Vanderbilts or Rockefellers would feel at home.

Merit Award in Historic Resources

Dorchester House Canopy Replacement

Washington, DC

Steve Dickens Architecture, PLLC

Structural Engineers: SK&A Structural Engineers, PLLC

Contractor: Shelterline Ltd.

The entry canopy of this 1941 apartment building was dysfunctional from the start: repeatedly battered by passing cars and trucks, leaking, and oppressively low, it was long overdue for a makeover. The challenge was to make the canopy more functional without compromising the spirit of its original Art Deco/Streamline Moderne styling. **Steve Dickens, AIA, LEED AP** found a solution that evoked the original design of the structure but made modest departures in details, proportions, and overall size to meet the needs of the property owner.

When first built, the canopy was supported by four columns, each composed of three stainless steel colonettes separated by fluted glass and with a neon tube running down the middle. According to long-time building residents, this glamorous illumination lasted only a few weeks; the columns were soon sideswiped



Entrance canopy of the Dorchester House before reconstruction.

Photo courtesy of Steve Dickens Architecture